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GETTING PEOPLE TO BUY, ALWAYS

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Creating touchpoints in stores and embracing the social media world keep consumers engaged with brands

The consumer world is now more digitised, social, networked, fun and experiential. The simple buy-and-sell process now extends to communities and even more science, as brand owners keep consumers engaged before and after they have entered the stores.

In India, retail and consultancy company Fitch has found that the generally colour-confident consumers are conservative when it comes to painting their homes. Working with Asian Paints, Fitch observed that there is a need to create more touchpoints and inspire people to bring more colours to their otherwise white and neutral walls in their homes.

“Consumers in India want to know exactly how the selected paint colour is going to look like,” said Ian Bellhouse, CEO Asia Pacific of Fitch. He was speaking in Singapore Management University recently on the topic entitled ‘The Continuous Consumer’ organised by the Centre for Marketing Excellence.

Fitch advised and worked with Asian Paints to create a walk-in décor, magazine-like flagship store that amongst other touch points, allows people to choose colours that are painted on blocks, and place one on a radio frequency identification-enabled turntable that is linked to a computer containing a scanned image of their homes.

As a user moves the turntable, he/she could see how the chosen colour reacts with natural and ambient lighting and fits into his/her home, which is shown on a computer screen. A consultant would advise the user on the colours that would both look good and create the mood desired for the home.

“The customers are choosing and moving the cubes, instead the staff doing it for them. We’ve heard stories where since people touch stuff and play with them, they are more likely to buy,” says Bellhouse.

“So it is really important to give control in the hands of the customers that encourage them to buy.”

While the flagship store does not sell paint, consumers are able to have experiential moments, as its adjacent stores reported high sales turnover.

NAVIGATING THE SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD

What happens after one has bought a product? Does the relationship between the brand and the consumer ends after the transaction has been made?

For Nike, this is not the case. After buying a pair of running shoes from a Nike store, consumers can download from the Nike+ platform training and running apps on their smartphones to track their running progress, duration and distance covered. They can also compare their performance data with other like-minded users in the network and train together.

“We believe that consumers are not so much concerned about the question ‘what I can buy from you’ but ‘what can I achieve with you’?” says Bellhouse.

“Nike has changed since 10 years ago from selling products to building communities, which looks easy to replicate, judging from the sports events they have organised. Besides, the brand has created Nike Running Clubs in cities to create communities of runners.

“Nike identified common goals of what the brand and consumers want to achieve, such as running their first 10K or marathon, and considered how it can facilitate people to meet these goals in order for them to stay and buy from Nike for a long time.

“Rather than selling training shoes or apparel, Nike+ was created as the ‘glue’ for users to track their running performance and compare with other users. People love to set goals and milestones and see how they are doing compared to others.

“You can’t afford to let go of the customers the moment they walk out the door with your products. You’ve got to keep the relationship going and traditional customer relationship management programs don’t really operate at the level like this.

“Traditional media and advertising rarely have much effect on consumers anymore. Everyone is walking down the streets looking at their smartphones and they are not really paying attention to the messages that are shouting out for them to go somewhere or buy something.

“Most things are social media-driven now. We now learn about new products and services through the social media and how we interact and share with others have changed fundamentally.”

OVERCOMING NEGATIVE NOISE

Despite the possibility of online users making negative comments of brands or buying experience, Bellhouse says social media is still a viable way for companies to engage their customers.

“With a note of caution, embrace the social media world. Get in there, start talking and listening. Make sure that there is a dialogue going on and get involved. Expect 100 percent transparency as you will get fanned out if you do something inappropriate,” says Bellhouse.

“When you get fanned out, you can ride through it if you do enough good stuff to counter the bad stuff, which the bad stuff is not really that bad.

"It is a big mistake when brands try to control the social media. They just need to let people say what they like and make sure that the companies are doing good stuff.

"What is interesting is that when people first started talking online, the messages tended to be negative in nature and people would not bother if it's all good. Now, it is almost the opposite where people like to share good stories and make recommendations. In most cases, they are not reading all the individual comments but aggregated results and rankings.

"It is about having a good social media program and doing something to overcome the negative noise."